

REASON IN REVOLT

The Rigged Game

How the Abrahamic Religions Judged Other Gods While
Claiming Exemption for Their Own

PANINI

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1 The Claim to Judge Everyone

By what authority did the God of Abraham become the judge of every other people's gods? Who established that his revelation was authentic, his commands binding, and his verdict on humanity final? These questions come before obedience. A claim to govern the human conscience must first establish its right to be believed.

This essay proceeds from an explicitly atheist baseline: all claims of divine revelation are human constructs. I therefore examine scriptures as human texts, doctrines as human formulations, and religious institutions as human organizations exercising authority. Appeals to "divine intent" presuppose the very authority under examination. They explain how believers understand their claims; they do not independently establish those claims as true.

The familiar answer is that God chose Abraham and his descendants. Genesis 18:19 connects that choice with righteousness and justice; Deuteronomy 7:7-8 invokes divine love and an ancestral oath. These are explanations within the tradition. They do not establish its authority over people outside it. Were righteousness and justice absent among Greeks, Indians, or Chinese? What independent evidence turns one people's account of its relationship with God into a verdict binding on everyone else?

The problem is circular authority. Scripture certifies the revelation, and the revelation certifies scripture. Once that circle is accepted, the believer can classify other gods as inventions or demons. For an outsider, however, the authority doing the classifying is precisely what remains to be demonstrated.

My argument is that the Abrahamic traditions have repeatedly converted this unproved authority into a right to judge, subordinate, or displace rival beliefs. Its sharpest moral consequence appears when an upright life is declared insufficient because the person living it has not accepted the required faith. The intellectual claim became a political instrument when rulers and religious institutions enforced it. I call this the rigged game: one party claims the power to set the standard, pronounce the verdict, and punish refusal, while protecting its own founding claims from the scrutiny it directs at others.

This essay examines that recurring pattern in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Its subject is religious authority embodied in texts, institutions, and states. The question is how that authority was asserted, what followed when it gained power, and whether its claim to universality can withstand an examination it does not control. I do not believe that hell exists. I examine the pronouncements made in its name: what they say about moral worth, whose obedience they demand, and how they have been used to govern the living. The authority claimed by the speaker is the subject of the inquiry.

2 How the Exemption Works

The Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran contain vigorous attacks on rival worship. Isaiah 44 mocks the craftsman who fashions an idol from the same material he uses for a fire. Deuteronomy 32:17 and 1 Corinthians 10:20 associate rival sacrifices with demons. Quran 53:23 dismisses the named deities under discussion as names inherited from ancestors. These passages invite skepticism about other people's religious explanations.

That skepticism should be reciprocal. If an image can be a human manufacture, a report of revelation can also be a human manufacture. If inherited worship deserves examination, inherited scripture deserves examination. The fact that one object is carved in wood and another expressed in words does not establish which, if either, comes from a god.

Religious defenses commonly interrupt the inquiry at this point. The text is declared divine, its authority becomes a premise, and criticism is judged by whether it conforms to that premise. Deuteronomy 13 tests a claimant's signs against allegiance to the established God. Deuteronomy 18 also supplies a test concerning failed prediction. Such passages show that scripture can authorize tests. The unresolved question is whether the authority behind the tests may itself be rejected on evidence, without the rejection being treated as rebellion.

The same difficulty appears in miracle claims. Exodus 7 presents competing wonders by Moses and Aaron and by Pharaoh's magicians. Mark 3:22-30 records a dispute over the power behind Jesus's exorcisms. A reported extraordinary event does not identify its cause merely because the narrator names one. To establish divine agency, the argument must do more than assign the preferred explanation to the preferred religious actor.

Moral judgment poses a still sharper test. Christian critics condemned the cruelty and sexual conduct attributed to pagan gods. Yet biblical conquest narratives include commands to destroy populations, as in Deuteronomy 20 and 1 Samuel 15. If cruelty discredits a rival deity, divine authorization cannot automatically excuse it in one's own. An appeal to God's inscrutable purposes may express submission, but it does not supply a moral argument that an outsider must accept.

The point is not that every difficult question has been forbidden in every theological school. It is that inquiry loses its independence when the founding authority must survive whatever the inquiry discovers. A permitted debate within a creed is different from an examination in which the creed itself can fail.

When penalties protect that boundary, the defect becomes unmistakable. Leviticus 24:16 prescribes death for blasphemy. Christian authorities executed heretics, including Servetus in Geneva in 1553 and Bruno in Rome in 1600. Spinoza was expelled from Amsterdam's Jewish community in 1656. The 1989 fatwa against Salman Rushdie demanded punishment for a literary work. These acts differed greatly in severity and circumstance, but each shows religious authority policing the limits of permissible dissent.

A threat cannot establish a revelation. It can only raise the cost of disputing one.

3 The Gods Placed on Trial

The religions classified as pagan were not an empty space awaiting thought. They belonged to peoples with accounts of nature, moral obligations, sacred histories, and philosophical disputes. To understand what the Abrahamic verdict displaced, we must first recognize what was already there.

Greek thought ranged from the gods of Homer to criticism of those very gods. Xenophanes challenged the projection of human appearance onto divinity. Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Plotinus developed different accounts of ultimate reality, cosmic order, and first principles. Rome combined civic worship with philosophical reflection on the divine. Neither civilization lacked the capacity to question inherited belief or imagine a reality beyond a local shrine.

Egypt had elaborate traditions of creation and judgment long before Christianity or Islam. Amun, Ra, Ptah, Osiris, and Isis belonged to a religious world that cannot be dismissed as an assortment of provincial superstitions merely by asserting the superiority of a later revelation. Akhenaten's elevation of the Aten also demonstrates that concentrated, exclusive worship was not an Abrahamic invention.

African traditions likewise contain conceptions of supreme creative power. Olodumare among the Yoruba, Nyame among the Akan, and Chukwu among the Igbo cannot be made intellectually negligible by giving them the label "tribal." The label describes the speaker's classification; it does not settle the truth of the belief.

The comparison extends further. Zoroastrianism presents Ahura Mazda as a supreme divine power. The Upanishadic conception of Brahman addresses the ground of reality. Chinese thought gives Tian a place in accounts of cosmic and moral order. Tengri occupied a central position in the religious and political worlds of the steppe. These ideas differ substantially, but their differences do not erase the question they raise: who decided that universality belonged to only one religious lineage?

I need not establish the truth of any of these conceptions to reject an unsupported verdict against them. The burden lies with whoever claims to know which gods exist and which peoples have been deceived. Calling a god universal is a claim requiring an argument. Calling another god local does not provide it.

Nor can military success decide the matter. A god's universality is not demonstrated by the reach of his followers' armies, because if it were, the reach of the Mongols would prove Tengri. Victory establishes who acquired power. It leaves the question of religious truth unanswered.

4 From Exclusive Truth to Exclusive Rule

An assertion of truth becomes a public danger when it is used to deny another person's freedom to reject it. Believing that a proposition is true does not, by itself, confer jurisdiction over the person who disagrees. That additional claim must be examined directly.

In its demand for exclusive ownership of truth and obedience, monotheism becomes greed at a metaphysical level. Material greed seeks possession of land, wealth, or labor. This theological form seeks possession of the final explanation: the only legitimate God, the authorized revelation, the permissible worship, and the conditions under which every human being may be saved.

The decisive word is exclusive. Other peoples may be permitted to exist while their inherited relationship to the divine is declared illegitimate. Their sacred places remain errors, their ancestors remain deluded, and their future is judged by an authority they have never accepted. The demand extends beyond territory into conscience and beyond death into eternity.

This is why the language of salvation can accompany coercion without appearing contradictory to those who impose it. If refusal leads to eternal ruin, an earthly penalty can be represented as a lesser injury undertaken for the victim's benefit. Augustine's defense of coercion against the Donatists shows this reasoning at work: pressure could, in his account, help bring people into religious truth.^[1] The persecutor could understand himself as a benefactor.

Universal mission enlarges the field. Christianity's command to make disciples of all nations and Islam's claim to a revelation for humanity carry their messages beyond a single inherited community. Persuasion becomes domination when refusal ceases to be an acceptable outcome. The moral question is therefore concrete: may the person approached say no and remain free?

The three traditions do not organize belonging or expansion identically. Judaism's covenantal structure cannot simply be substituted for Christianity's missionary institutions or Islam's political and legal history. Their common vulnerability lies in the claim that a disputed revelation can authorize binding judgments about outsiders. The historical form and extent of enforcement must then be shown in each case.

Greed and doctrine can cooperate. A ruler may seek revenue while a cleric supplies justification; a conqueror may seek territory while sincerely believing that conquest serves God. Mixed motives do not absolve the doctrine. They require us to show what work it performed: authorizing seizure, defining inferiority, rewarding obedience, or making resistance a religious offense.

5 When the Claim Acquired an Army

The clearest evidence is found where religious authority was written into demands and penalties. Here the connection between doctrine and domination does not have to be inferred merely from the ruler's religious identity.

Charlemagne's Capitulary for Saxony imposed death on those who refused baptism and wished to remain pagan.^[2] The issue was more than military allegiance. The law made continued religious identity punishable. A Saxon could submit to a conquering ruler and still face the demand to abandon the gods of his ancestors.

In 782, at Verden, Charlemagne ordered the execution of a reported 4,500 Saxons. The revised Royal Frankish Annals describe them as having been beheaded in a single day after a rebellion and the defeat of Frankish forces.^[2] The reported number is debated. The annals present the executions as punishment for revolt; they do not establish that each victim was killed simply for refusing baptism. The massacre nevertheless belongs to the same campaign of conquest and enforced Christianization in which religious submission became a condition of political obedience.

The Spanish Requerimiento of 1513 made an even more expansive claim. It traced authority from God through Saint Peter and the papacy to the Spanish Crown, then demanded that Indigenous peoples acknowledge that jurisdiction. Refusal exposed them to war, enslavement, and seizure of property. The proclamation assigned responsibility for the resulting injuries to those who resisted.^[3]

Its logic deserves attention. The claimed grant was made within a religious system the inhabitants had never authorized. Yet their rejection of that system was treated as disobedience to a rightful superior. An unproved theological premise became a demand

for political submission. The people threatened were then blamed for the violence used to enforce it.

Papal authorization also joined spiritual purpose to material acquisition. Romanus Pontifex in 1455 reaffirmed powers granted to Portugal to conquer designated non-Christian enemies, appropriate possessions, and reduce people to perpetual slavery.^[4] Here theological classification supplied permission to take human beings and their property. The victims did not have to accept the classification for the conqueror to benefit from it.

Islamic sources likewise require examination where religious status and coercive power meet. Quran 9:29 connects fighting specified People of the Book with their payment of jizya and submission.^[5] Sahih al-Bukhari 6922 records a command prescribing death for changing one's Islamic religion.^[6] These are distinct issues: the political position of outsiders and the freedom of insiders to leave. Both concern the use of power to maintain a religious order.

The critic must distinguish conquest, conversion, and subordination. They are not identical events. A population may retain its religion while losing political equality; conversion may occur long after conquest. Those distinctions sharpen the indictment. They make it possible to identify precisely what a law or ruler demanded and what refusal cost.

The larger record includes the suppression of pagan worship in the Christian Roman Empire, crusading expansion in the Baltic, Islamic conquests in Persia and India, and the destruction or appropriation of sacred sites. Their histories require individual investigation. The examples above establish the essential mechanism without requiring every conquest to have the same motive: religious authority could supply explicit grounds for coercion.

6 The Peoples Behind the Word Pagan

What that coercion confronted was a world of particular peoples. In Europe, older religious traditions belonged to Greeks and Romans, Gauls and Saxons, Norse peoples, Slavs, Balts, and many others. Across North Africa and western Asia were Egyptian, Berber, Mesopotamian, Persian, and Arabian religious worlds. In the Americas were Maya, Mexica, Andean, Caribbean, and numerous other communities whose histories did not begin when Europeans arrived.

The pressure was neither uniform nor equally successful everywhere. Indian religions survived conquest; East Asian societies received, resisted, or adapted missionary claims

in different ways. Elsewhere, older worship lost its public institutions or survived beneath new religious forms. The central issue is the recurrent demand that another people's sacred inheritance justify its continued existence before an imported authority.

The history also defeats an ethnic explanation. The gods displaced included those of peoples who spoke Semitic languages. Pre-Islamic Arabian deities and the older gods of Mesopotamia and the Levant were not protected by linguistic kinship. What mattered was allegiance to the authorized revelation.

Nor did the doctrine remain confined to its region of origin. Romans, Franks, Iberians, Russians, Turks, and other converted peoples became carriers of religious authority and imperial power. A society could abandon its ancestral worship and subsequently impose its adopted faith on another. Conversion could thus reproduce the machinery of displacement across languages and continents.

That is why the relevant continuity is theological and institutional. The same political relationship could recur with different rulers and different populations: an authority claiming universal jurisdiction confronted people who had never granted it that jurisdiction. The dispute concerned their freedom to continue without its permission.

7 The Wars Within the Family

Acceptance did not end the dispute over authority. It moved the boundary. Once a person entered the religious community, the question became which interpretation, church, school, or leadership possessed the truth. The machinery used to exclude outsiders could be directed against rival insiders.

Christian anti-Judaism made this especially destructive. Jews inhabited the scriptures Christians claimed as their own, yet were accused of rejecting their fulfillment. Charges of collective guilt and religious blindness helped sustain persecution, expulsions, and violence. The Rhineland massacres during the First Crusade illustrate how a sacred campaign could turn against a neighboring population.

Christian division generated further contests over legitimate belief. Catholics and Protestants persecuted one another; dissenters could be condemned by both. The French Wars of Religion and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre show how theological allegiance could become a matter of life and death. The sack of Constantinople by crusaders in 1204 also exposed the weakness of shared Christianity as a guarantee against predation.

Islamic history presents its own disputes over succession, legitimacy, and doctrine. The First Fitna and the killing of Husayn at Karbala became central to enduring communal

divisions. Later conflicts and persecutions, including the Safavid imposition of Shiism in Iran and the use of takfir to declare other Muslims unbelievers, show how religious boundaries could be enforced within the professing community.

Jewish history also contains conflicts over authorized belief and practice, including divisions between Karaites and Rabbanites and disputes involving Hasidim and their opponents. These episodes should be described at their actual scale. Excommunication, exclusion, and organized warfare are different acts; their relevance here is the contested power to define legitimate membership.

The founding narratives themselves supplied language for rivalry. The story of Isaac and Ishmael could be invoked to describe later antagonisms, just as conquest narratives could be invoked to justify claims to land. Such uses show scripture entering political argument. They do not make modern conflicts simple repetitions of an ancient family quarrel.

The central failure is that a shared claim to divine authority supplies no independent procedure for settling incompatible interpretations of it. When institutions cannot accept disagreement, power decides who may teach, govern, or remain within the community. Conversion then offers membership without guaranteeing freedom of conscience.

8 When Goodness Is Not Enough

Consider a Hindu who lives honestly, a Buddhist who relieves suffering, or a person faithful to an African ancestral religion who treats others with courage and generosity. Consider a Chinese or Japanese person who practices comparable virtues while rejecting Christian and Islamic claims. What moral failure has any of them committed merely by remaining unconvinced?

Under strict exclusivist accounts of salvation, their conduct cannot compensate for the absence of the required faith. John 14:6 locates access to the Father through Jesus.^[7] Quran 3:85 rejects a religious way other than Islam and links that rejection to loss in the hereafter.^[8] When these passages are interpreted as requiring acceptance of the authorized revelation, a good life outside that allegiance is judged insufficient. Religious affiliation becomes a condition that moral character cannot independently satisfy. Correct belief is therefore a precondition for salvation in these accounts. Righteous conduct remains important, but it is subordinate in the decisive sense that it cannot substitute for the required allegiance. Goodness does not overcome unbelief.

That is the issue. Christianity and Islam both give importance to conduct: James 2 insists on the connection between faith and works, and Quran 99:7-8 assigns significance even

to the smallest good or evil deed.^[9] Yet giving deeds weight does not answer whether a virtuous unbeliever can be excluded for unbelief. If the answer is yes, then the decisive barrier is the person's refusal or inability to affirm a theological claim.

Gandhi makes the issue concrete. Under a Christian or Muslim interpretation that excludes a person who dies outside the required faith, his Hindu beliefs would bar salvation despite the moral achievements for which he is admired. No claim that Gandhi was faultless is needed. The question is why remaining Hindu should itself disqualify a person whose conduct is otherwise judged admirable. A pronouncement condemning him on that ground reveals the hierarchy: religious allegiance decides what moral achievement cannot.

Why should honest disbelief outweigh an upright life? A person may understand a religious argument and find its evidence inadequate. Demanding belief does not make belief possible. Punishing the resulting uncertainty makes intellectual submission a condition of safety. The institution asks the person to call its claim true before establishing why that judgment is warranted.

Conversion, in this setting, involves a transfer of religious allegiance. When former worship is condemned as idolatrous or demonic, the convert is asked to reinterpret ancestral devotion through the new religion's verdict. What parents regarded as sacred must now be treated as error; practices once associated with gratitude, mourning, or belonging may become offenses against the newly accepted God.

The demand can become culturally destructive when religious repudiation expands into contempt for the people who transmitted the older tradition. A convert can then be pressured to regard rejection of inherited worship as proof of enlightenment and attachment to it as evidence of spiritual failure. Self-contempt becomes a badge of loyalty when a community teaches that the convert's origins are shameful and that freedom consists in accepting its judgment without question.

Conversion does not logically require hatred of one's language, family, art, or entire culture. The indictment belongs where that additional demand is actually made. But when ancestral contempt and unquestioning obedience are presented as conditions of salvation, I call the result mental slavery. Authority has entered the person's judgment of his own past and claimed the power to decide what he must despise.

The objection concerns the pronouncement itself. I am not asking whether Gandhi, or anyone else, actually inhabits a supernatural place of punishment. I am asking what kind of moral authority condemns an upright person for withholding assent, and why that authority expects its judgment to govern people outside its faith.

A humanist must reject the premise that a person's moral worth depends on surrendering an honestly held judgment. An upright life does not become contemptible because it was lived outside the approved creed. No authority has established a right to make intellectual submission the price of escaping eternal punishment.

9 Who Appointed the Judges of Eternity

The dispute becomes more severe when exclusion is projected beyond death. Religious authorities have defined conditions of salvation, identified heresy, and pronounced on the fate of those who believe differently. The Athanasian Creed and medieval formulations of salvation outside the Church demonstrate the force with which Christian belonging could be tied to eternal consequences. Islamic sectarian claims and Jewish discussions of exclusion from the world to come likewise place immense weight on doctrinal judgment.

The decisive question remains unanswered: who established the authority to issue these verdicts?

A theologian may admit some outsiders to salvation and exclude others. That arrangement may be more generous than a rival's, but generosity is not verification. Neither Maimonides nor a church council acquires knowledge of eternity merely by specifying its conditions. Their statements are evidence of what they teach. Their accuracy about an afterlife requires a separate argument.

I could announce that French Christians are saved and English Christians doomed. The immediate and proper response would be to ask what warrants my verdict. Lengthening the declaration into a theological system, attracting followers, or preserving it for centuries would not answer the question. The burden cannot disappear when a religious institution makes an equivalent claim with greater ceremony.

The outsider therefore need not petition for a favorable classification. Asking whether a doctrine makes room for me already risks accepting its right to assign the rooms. My prior question is whether the authority claiming to determine my fate has established any reliable knowledge of that fate.

This is where theological inclusion leaves the underlying problem intact. A verdict can become more accommodating while remaining unsupported. Human equality should not depend on securing an exemption from someone else's account of damnation.

10 Scripture Slavery and the Ownership of People

The demand for submission was not confined to the mind. Religious authority also entered the law of ownership, determining who could be possessed, inherited, compelled to work, or denied the freedom to leave. The connection between spiritual authority and material power becomes especially stark when the person commanded to obey is legally someone else's property.

Leviticus 25:44-46 permits acquiring slaves from surrounding nations and passing them to descendants as permanent possessions. It distinguishes those foreigners from fellow Israelites, whose treatment is subject to different restrictions.^[10] The passage does not merely report that slavery existed. It authorizes ownership and inheritance of human beings. The religious identity of the lawgiver cannot exempt that authorization from moral judgment.

The distinction in this passage is between Israelites and outsiders. It should not be confused with a modern classification by skin color. Later racial systems added their own accounts of inherited inferiority. Precision matters because the indictment already stands without the additional claim: a sacred law assigns different people unequal protection from permanent enslavement.

The Slave Bible of 1807 shows how religious instruction could be adapted to protect bondage. Published in London for use among enslaved Africans in the British Caribbean, it presented selected portions of scripture. Its editors removed material, including the Exodus liberation narrative, that could encourage resistance, while emphasizing passages that supported obedience. The Museum of the Bible and the University of Glasgow document this deliberate selection.^[11]

The relationship between physical and mental subjection is unusually visible here. Enslaved people were offered religious instruction through a text whose contents had been chosen to make their condition more acceptable. The authority presenting the message also restricted access to passages that might challenge the masters' interests. Control of scripture became an instrument of control over its readers.

The Quran also recognizes slavery as an existing and permissible institution. Quran 23:5-6 allows sexual relations with wives and enslaved women in a man's possession.^[12] Quran 24:33 provides for contracts of emancipation and prohibits forcing enslaved women into prostitution.^[13] These provisions regulate ownership and create routes out of it; they do not establish an unconditional ban on owning another human being. Encouraging the release of a slave does not erase the permission to hold one.

The relevant Quranic passages do not identify an inferior race whose members must be enslaved. Their categories concern status and possession. The moral question is sufficiently grave as stated: on what grounds may one person own another, and why should a religious authorization make that ownership legitimate? Racial contempt can reinforce slavery without being the explicit premise of every scriptural provision that permits it.

The historical scale was immense. The transatlantic trade carried approximately 12.5 million Africans onto slave ships, of whom about 10.7 million arrived alive in the Americas.^[14] European colonial powers and their commercial networks built this traffic on a vast scale. Eastern routes carried enslaved Africans through coastal markets and Zanzibar to destinations including Arabia, Persia, and India.^[15] These were extensive systems of trade and forced labor, sustained across generations.

The numbers establish the magnitude of the crime. The texts and institutions establish particular religious connections to it. Papal grants authorized conquest and enslavement; the Slave Bible shaped instruction to support bondage; Islamic societies maintained slavery within religiously regulated legal orders. The charge is strongest when each actor's authority and conduct are identified, rather than treating a religious label as a complete explanation of every transaction.

Saudi Arabia formally abolished slavery in November 1962, during King Saud's reign, with Crown Prince Faisal leading the government's reform program.^[16] Legal human ownership thus survived there into the second half of the twentieth century. Abolition required an explicit governmental act; it cannot be projected backward as though recognition of slavery in earlier law had already abolished the institution.

The colonial relationship likewise joined the appetite for land and labor to contempt for those whose independence obstructed it. Conversion could change a person's official religious standing without returning stolen land or ending inherited subordination. Acceptance into the master's religion was no guarantee of equality with the master.

This is the connection between material greed and metaphysical entitlement. A system could claim the authority to judge a person's soul while authorizing possession of that person's body. Where religious instruction taught the enslaved to accept that arrangement, the demand for inward obedience helped secure outward bondage. Sacred permission did not make ownership just. It gave the owner a justification he could call divine.

11 The Hypothetical Disappearance

Now suppose that the external peoples and territories European and Arab empires sought to convert, rule, or exploit ceased to exist. Leave those imperial societies with one another and with their own internal divisions. Would the disappearance of their external targets produce peace?

Their histories give little reason to expect it. European powers fought other European powers through dynastic struggles, religious wars, and the catastrophes of the two world wars. Arab states and political movements also fought one another, as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the conflicts within Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Libya demonstrate. Enemies did not have to come from a distant civilization.

These examples answer a specific question. External peoples were not necessary for internal domination and war. Their imagined disappearance would leave the pursuit of power, competing claims to legitimacy, and the institutions capable of enforcing those claims. A society does not become peaceful simply because it runs out of outsiders.

The world wars cannot reasonably be explained as straightforward wars over Abrahamic doctrine. Their relevance to this thought experiment is that shared civilizational ancestry and religious inheritance failed to prevent immense internal destruction. The existence of that destruction supports the hypothesis that conflict could continue after external targets disappeared.

Religious exclusivity supplies an additional route to the same outcome. Once outsiders have been defeated or absorbed, disagreement can be relocated inside the community. The heretic, apostate, or allegedly impure believer becomes the next object of correction. A monopoly on truth must police its own boundaries as well as its frontiers.

The implication is institutional. Peace requires limits on the power to dominate, including the power to enforce belief. Postwar reconciliation among western European states rested on practical arrangements for security, cooperation, and the restraint of national rivalry. It did not require agreement about salvation. People can live together while disagreeing about God when disagreement no longer licenses coercion.

12 The Empiricist Test

The history brings us back to the question with which we began: what can actually be established? My empiricist standard is straightforward. A claim about reality must show how evidence bears on it, how that evidence can be examined, and what would count against the claim. The examiner's religious allegiance cannot decide the result in advance.

Some religious claims concern historical events and can be investigated historically. Whether a person lived, a battle occurred, or a text was composed at a particular time is not beyond inquiry merely because a religion discusses it. Claims of divine authorship, exclusive access to salvation, or eternal punishment require further evidence that historical investigation alone does not supply.

The Abrahamic traditions disagree about matters central to their authority. Christianity identifies Jesus as divine; Islam rejects that identification. Judaism does not accept the Christian account of Jesus's messianic status. Islam presents Muhammad as the final prophet, a claim the other two traditions do not accept. These positions cannot all be correct in the same sense.

Disagreement alone does not prove that every position is false. It establishes the need for a method of deciding among them. Appealing to a disputed revelation cannot settle the dispute unless the revelation's authority is independently supported. Threatening the doubter adds pressure without adding evidence.

Birth and upbringing further expose the difficulty. People ordinarily encounter religion first through family, language, and community, long before they can evaluate competing claims. If an eternal penalty depends on accepting the correct revelation, access to reliable evidence becomes a matter of justice. Why should the circumstances of birth so heavily shape the answer to a question said to determine everlasting fate?

The challenge does not require certainty that no god exists. It requires the claimant to justify the authority claimed. Until that is done, withholding assent is rational. No institution earns the right to punish uncertainty by describing the uncertainty as sin.

13 What Displacement Takes Away

Religious displacement also destroys access to the past. Sacred institutions carry languages, calendars, art, music, oral histories, and accounts of the natural world. When they are suppressed, losses extend far beyond the propositions a conqueror considers false.

Egypt's temples sustained forms of learning bound to its older religious life. In northern Europe, knowledge of pre-Christian traditions often reaches us through fragments recorded by opponents or by writers working after conversion. The loss of the institutions that transmitted a tradition makes its reconstruction dependent on the people who replaced it.

The burning of Maya books under Bishop Diego de Landa in 1562 is an especially stark example. Destroying a book prevents later readers from deciding for themselves what it contained and what it was worth. A victorious theology cannot restore that choice by assuring descendants that the destruction served their salvation.

Colonial schools that separated Indigenous children from their languages and communities extended the same injury into family life. The authority to decide what children must forget is a formidable form of power. When ancestral memory is treated as an impediment to conversion or assimilation, the institution claims the future by severing its connection to the past.

Preserving a tradition does not require believing every claim within it. One can reject its gods and still defend its books, languages, buildings, and people's freedom to practice. That distinction is essential to an honest criticism of religion. Evidence can challenge a belief without destroying the community capable of answering.

14 The Standard of Reciprocity

The remedy begins with equal terms of examination. Whatever test is used against one revelation must be available against another. Antiquity, political success, inherited devotion, and institutional prestige cannot substitute for evidence. A doctrine gains no exemption because questioning it is painful to its adherents.

Freedom of conscience must include the freedom to change or leave a religion. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that principle.^[17] Without a genuine right of exit, membership can become captivity. Without a right to criticize, religious debate occurs under the authority of the belief being debated.

The state should protect people in their freedom to believe, worship, disagree, or abstain. It should not enforce a theological verdict about who deserves salvation. No government has demonstrated competence to administer eternity. Its coercive powers concern living human beings, whose safety and equal standing must not depend on the ruler's creed.

Historical accountability follows the same rule. A text can be examined for what it commands, an institution for what it authorized, and a ruler for what was done under his

authority. Neither an appeal to noble ideals nor a catalogue of someone else's crimes answers a specific charge. Responsibility must be addressed where the evidence places it.

That is the challenge of this essay. The Abrahamic traditions have claimed a jurisdiction reaching beyond their own communities and, in consequential historical settings, enforced it through law and conquest. Their success in commanding obedience does not establish the truth of the claims on which that jurisdiction rested.

A person standing outside those claims is entitled to demand the evidence before accepting the verdict. His honesty does not become a defect because it prevents assent, and his ancestry does not become shameful because another religion condemns its worship. He need not seek permission to preserve his conscience or feel gratitude for being spared a punishment whose legitimacy has never been demonstrated.

The game remains rigged wherever a religious authority reserves the right to judge every rival while denying rivals the same freedom to examine it. The rule that ends the rigging is simple: the authority that judges must itself be open to judgment.

The gods silenced by decree were denied a hearing. The authorities that silenced them still owe the world an argument.

Selected sources

Scriptural passages are identified in the essay by book, chapter, and verse. The following primary texts, collection records, and research sources support the specific documents, provisions, and figures discussed; they are not a comprehensive bibliography of the historical survey.

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[10] Leviticus 25:44-46. New American Bible, Revised Edition, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: [Read source](#)

[11] Museum of the Bible, The Slave Bible: Let the Story Be Told: [Read source](#) ; University of Glasgow, Beniba Centre for Slavery Studies, Slave Bible collection record and exhibition: [Read source](#)

[12] Quran 23:5-6, translation by Mustafa Khattab, The Clear Quran. Quran.com: [Read source](#)

[13] Quran 24:33, comparative translations. Quranic Arabic Corpus: [Read source](#)

[14] SlaveVoyages, A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, estimates of approximately 12.5 million embarked and 10.7 million arriving in the Americas: [Read source](#)

[15] Tanzania's submission to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, The Central Slave and Ivory Trade Route, on East African routes and destinations: [Read source](#)

[16] The King Saud Library, Slavery During the Reign of King Saud, on the November 1962 abolition decree and Faisal's reform statement: [Read source](#) ; United States Department of State, 2002 Trafficking in Persons Report, Saudi Arabia: [Read source](#)

[17] United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 18. Official booklet: [Read source](#)

Table 1: Selected Violence, Coercion and Religious Conflict (Biblical Era to Modern Times)

Scope: Israelite/Jewish, Christian and Muslim actors. Motives and claimed authority are distinguished where evidence allows. Scriptural narration does not itself establish divine approval or historical confirmation. Events overlap with Tables 2 and 3.

The three tables contain 210 entries, including overlapping events. Scriptural accounts, historical evidence, motives and explicit authorization are distinct. Undated estimates are not current totals. Correction sources follow Table 3.

A. Israelite and Jewish Actors (Hebrew Bible Era)

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
c. 13th c. BCE (trad.)	Israelites under Moses	Midianites	Males and non-virgin women killed, virgin girls taken (Num. 31)	Command of God after Baal-Peor	Textual
c. 13th c. BCE (trad.)	Israelites	Amorites under Sihon and Og	Cities "utterly destroyed" (Num. 21; Deut. 2-3)	Herem	Textual
c. 13th c. BCE (trad.)	Israelites under Moses (Levites carry out)	About 3,000 Israelites	Killed after the golden calf (Ex. 32)	Command of God; idolatry	Textual
c. 13th-12th c. BCE (trad.)	Israelites under Joshua	Canaanite cities: Jericho, Ai, Makkedah, Lachish, Hebron, Hazor, others	Total destruction reported (Josh. 6-11)	Deut. 7:1-5; 20:16-18	Not supported by archaeology as written
Judges era	Jephthah's men (Gilead)	42,000 Ephraimites	Killed at the Jordan fords (Judg. 12)	Tribal conflict; no explicit divine command cited here	Textual
Judges era	Tribe of Dan	People of Laish	Peaceful town destroyed (Judg. 18)	Territorial conquest; priestly oracle in Judges 18:5-6	Textual

A. Israelite and Jewish Actors (Hebrew Bible Era)

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
Judges era	Israelite tribes	Tribe of Benjamin; Jabesh-gilead	Near-annihilation of a tribe; 400 girls seized (Judg. 19-21)	Oath before the Lord	Textual
c. 11th c. BCE	Saul, on Samuel's command	Amalekites	Men, women, children, livestock killed; Agag hacked down (1 Sam. 15)	"Thus says the Lord" (1 Sam. 15:2-3)	Textual
c. 10th c. BCE	David, Joab	Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites	Prisoners and males killed (2 Sam. 8:2; 1 Kings 11:15-16)	Divine victory	Textual
9th c. BCE	Elijah	450 prophets of Baal	Slaughtered at Kishon (1 Kings 18)	Contest with Baal; Deut. 13	Textual
9th c. BCE	Jehu	House of Ahab, Joram, Jezebel, worshippers of Baal	Killed, including worshippers inside their temple (2 Kings 9-10)	Prophetic commission	Textual; Jehu appears in Assyrian records
8th c. BCE	Menahem of Israel	People of Tappuah	Pregnant women ripped open (2 Kings 15:16)	No religious authorization stated in the narrative	Textual
Early 8th c. BCE	Amaziah of Judah	10,000 Edomite prisoners	Thrown from a cliff (2 Chron. 25:12)	Victory credited to God	Textual
c. 622 BCE	Josiah	Priests of the high places	Killed; altars and bones desecrated (2 Kings 23)	Deut. 12; 13	Textual
c. 125 BCE	John Hyrcanus (Hasmonean)	Idumeans	Forced circumcision or expulsion	Judaization of conquered peoples	Josephus
c. 112-111 BCE	John Hyrcanus (Hasmonean)	Samaritans	Gerizim temple and Shechem destroyed	Rival sanctuary	Josephus

A. Israelite and Jewish Actors (Hebrew Bible Era)

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
c. 104 BCE	Aristobulus I (Hasmonean)	Itureans	Forced conversion	Judaization	Josephus

B. Christian Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
382-392	Emperors Gratian and Theodosius I	Roman and Greek pagans	Altar of Victory removed; sacrifice banned; temples closed	Imperial edicts against "superstition"	Documented
391	Bishop Theophilus and Christian crowds	Alexandrian pagans	Serapeum destroyed	Anti-idolatry	Documented
396	Alaric's Goths, with monks reported	Pagans of Eleusis	Sanctuary destroyed	Anti-pagan	Documented
415	Christian mob in Alexandria	Hypatia	Murdered	Political and religious hostility in the Cyril-Orestes conflict	Socrates, Church History VII.15
529	Emperor Justinian	Pagan philosophers; pagans of Asia Minor	Athenian schools closed; purges and forced baptism	Imperial law against paganism	Documented
c. 723-724	Boniface, under Frankish protection	Pagans at Geismar, Hesse	Sacred oak of Donar felled at Geismar	Conversion	Documented
772-804	Charlemagne	Saxons	War; about 4,500 executed at Verden (782); death for refusing baptism	Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae	Documented; figure debated

B. Christian Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
866	Boris I of Bulgaria	Bulgarian boyars	Revolt crushed; reportedly 52 families killed	Christianization	Chronicle tradition
995-1030	Olaf Tryggvason, Olaf Haraldsson	Norwegians	Forced baptism by threat, torture, killing	Christianization	Saga sources
997-1046	Stephen I of Hungary and successors	Koppány; pagan rebels	Killing, quartering; 1046 revolt crushed	Christianization	Documented
988-1000s	Vladimir of Kiev	Pagans of the Rus'	Idols destroyed; mass baptism; resistance suppressed	Christianization	Documented; details vary
1096	Crusader bands	Rhineland Jews (Speyer, Worms, Mainz)	Massacres; forced baptism	Crusading vow; Christ-killer charge	Documented; thousands killed
1099	First Crusade	Muslims and Jews of Jerusalem	Massacre after capture	Holy war; papal indulgence	Documented; numbers debated
1144 onward	Christian communities	Jews (Norwich, then elsewhere)	Blood-libel accusations and killings	Antisemitic doctrine	Documented
1147-1168	Danes, Saxons, Poles	Polabian Slavs	Wendish Crusade; Svantevit temple at Arkona destroyed	Crusade indulgence	Documented
1190	Mob at York	Jews of York	Massacre	Religious hatred	Documented
1204	Fourth Crusade	Christians of Constantinople	City sacked	Crusader and dynastic politics; sack condemned by Innocent III	Documented

B. Christian Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1209-1229	Northern French crusaders; later the Inquisition	Cathars and Occitans	Albigensian Crusade; Béziers (1209)	Papal crusade against heresy	Documented; tens of thousands killed
1230s-1290s	Teutonic Order	Old Prussians	Conquest and Christianization; language declined over subsequent centuries	Papal crusade bulls	Conquest documented; Old Prussian survived into the 17th century
1200s-1400s	Livonian Brothers, Teutonic Order	Livs, Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians	Crusades, conquest, forced baptism	Papal crusade bulls	Documented
1233 onward	Medieval Inquisition	Heretics, Jews	Trials, burnings	Papal decree Ad abolendam and successors	Documented
1290-1492	Crowns of England, France, Spain	Jews	Expulsions (Spain, 1492)	Religious unity	Documented
1348-1349	European mobs	Jews	Massacres during the Black Death	Well-poisoning libel	Documented
1478-1530s	Spanish Inquisition	Conversos, Moriscos, Protestants	Trials, executions, confiscations	Defense of orthodoxy	Documented; thousands executed
1493-1600s	Spain, Portugals	Indigenous peoples of the Americas	Conquest, enslavement, forced conversion; Requerimiento (1513)	Inter caetera (1493)	Documented
1521	Cortés and allies	Aztecs	Tenochtitlan besieged and destroyed	Conquest and conversion	Documented
1562	Diego de Landa	Maya	Codices and idols burned; torture at Maní	Extirpation of idolatry	Documented

B. Christian Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1502-1614	Castile, Spain	Muslims, Moriscos	Forced conversion; expulsion (1609-1614)	Religious unity	Documented
1450-1750	Church and secular courts	Accused witches, about 40,000-60,000 executed	Trials and burnings	Exodus 22:18; papal bull Summis desiderantes (1484)	Documented; estimates vary
1520s-1570s	Catholics, Protestants	Each other; Anabaptists	Persecutions; Servetus burned (1553); St. Bartholomew's Day (1572)	Doctrinal conflict	Documented
1618-1648	Catholic and Protestant states	Central Europeans	Thirty Years' War, millions dead	Confessional conflict	Documented
1637	Puritan colonists and allies	Pequot	Mystic massacre	Joshua-style conquest of Canaan	Documented
1649	Cromwell's army	Irish at Drogheda and Wexford	Massacres	Anti-Catholic zeal	Documented
1600s-1700s	Russian Orthodox state	Old Believers; Volga peoples	Persecution, self-immolations, pressure to convert	State Orthodoxy	Documented
1800s-1990s	Churches and states in Canada, the US, Australia	Indigenous children	Residential schools; abuse, deaths, cultural destruction	Christianizing mission	Documented
1880s-1900s	Christian mobs and states	Jews in the Russian Empire	Pogroms	Christian antisemitic tradition	Documented

C. Muslim Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
624-627	Muhammad and early community	Banu Qaynuqa, Nadir, Qurayza (Jewish tribes of Medina)	Expulsions; execution of Qurayza men (traditionally 600-900)	Alleged treachery; Quran 33:26	Early sources written later; scale debated
630	Muslim forces	Meccan polytheists	Idols destroyed; some proscriptions	Monotheism	Tradition
632-633	Abu Bakr	Arabian tribes	Ridda wars	Apostasy; zakat refusal	Tradition
636-651	Arab armies	Sasanian Iran (Zoroastrians)	Conquest; fire temples destroyed or converted	Conquest; Quran 9:29 for subjects	Documented; scale debated
647-709	Arab armies	Berbers	Conquest, enslavement, heavy taxation	Imperial expansion; specific religious authorization not supplied	Documented
680	Umayyad forces	Husayn and family at Karbala	Killed	Dynastic and sectarian	Documented
705-715	Qutayba ibn Muslim	Sogdians, Khwarezmians, Buddhists	Monasteries destroyed; Khwarezmian scholars suppressed	Imperial expansion; specific religious authorization not supplied	Documented
711-712	Muhammad bin Qasim	People of Sindh	Conquest; fighting men killed	Conquest; specific religious authorization not supplied	Later chronicles
1009	Caliph al-Hakim	Christians, Jews	Holy Sepulchre destroyed; persecution	Caliph's decrees	Documented

C. Muslim Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1000-1027	Mahmud of Ghazni	Hindu temples and communities (Mathura, Somnath)	Raids; Somnath sacked (1025)	Holy war and plunder	Documented
1033, 1066	Mobs in Fez; Granada	Jews	Massacres (Granada, c. 4,000 reported)	Religious grievance	Documented; figures debated
1146-1212	Almohads	Jews and Christians of Spain and North Africa	Forced conversion or exile	Doctrinal purification	Documented
1192-1206	Ghurids, Delhi Sultanate	Hindus, Buddhists	Temples demolished; Bihar monasteries (c. 1200)	Conquest; specific religious authorization not supplied	Documented
1398	Timur	People of Delhi	Sack, massacre	Pretext of lenient Muslim rule	Documented
1300s-1600s	Ottoman Empire	Balkan Christian families	Devshirme: boys taken and converted	Imperial recruitment	Documented
1453	Ottoman forces	People of Constantinople	Three days of plunder; Hagia Sophia converted	Conquest	Documented
1501 onward	Shah Ismail and Safavids	Sunnis of Iran	Forced conversion to Shi'ism	Religious unification	Documented
1529-1543	Ahmad "Gragh"	Ethiopian Christians	Churches and monasteries destroyed	Jihad	Documented
700s-1900s	Arab, Berber, Ottoman slave traders	Sub-Saharan Africans	Trans-Saharan, Red Sea, Indian Ocean trades; millions enslaved	Non-Muslims could be enslaved	Documented; numbers debated

C. Muslim Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1669-1707	Aurangzeb	Hindus, Sikhs	Temples demolished; jizya reimposed (1679); Guru Tegh Bahadur executed (1675)	Enforcement of Sharia	Documented; motives debated
1804-1810s	Usman dan Fodios	West African pagans and Muslim rulers	Jihad wars; Sokoto Caliphate	Jihad of reform	Documented
1860	Mobs in Damascus and Lebanon	Christians	Thousands killed	Communal hatred	Documented
1894-1923	Ottoman state, Kurdish irregulars	Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians	Massacres; 1915 genocide, 1 million or more dead	Nationalism with religious dimension	Documented
1933	Iraqi army and tribes	Assyrians at Simele	Massacre	Communal and political violence; religious authorization not supplied	Documented
1974-onward (undated)	Pakistani state and mobs	Ahmadis	Declared non-Muslim; killings and persecution	Finality of the Prophet	Documented
2001	Taliban	Bamiyan Buddhas (Buddhist heritage)	Destroyed	Anti-idolatry	Documented
2014-2017	ISIS	Yazidis, Christians, Shia	Massacres, enslavement, shrines destroyed	Claimed caliphate; classical slavery rules	Documented
2000s-onward (undated)	Boko Haram and other jihadist groups	Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the Sahel	Massacres, abductions	Jihadist ideology	Documented

C. Muslim Actors

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
onward (undated)	Several states	Apostates, blasphemers	Death penalty or imprisonment	Sharia interpretations	Country-specific law, enforcement and verification date required

Table 2: Wars and Persecution Within Each Abrahamic Religion

Scope: conflict and coercion within each religious tradition, including non-lethal exclusions. Religious, political and dynastic disputes are distinguished. Some entries repeat Table 1; do not add casualty figures across overlapping rows.

A. Jews Against Jews

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
c. 931-722 BCE	Kingdoms of Israel and Judah (mutual); Pekah of Israel in 2 Chron. 28:6	Judahites (120,000 killed in one day, per 2 Chron. 28:6) and Israelites in return	Standing war after the split of the kingdom (1 Kings 12-15)	Rival temples and cults (Jerusalem vs. Bethel and Dan)	Textual; figures likely inflated
167-160 BCE	Maccabean rebels (Mattathias and followers)	Hellenizing Jews; Jews who sacrificed to Greek gods	Mattathias kills a Jew about to sacrifice (1 Macc. 2); rebels force circumcision and kill apostates	Torah observance vs. Hellenization	1 and 2 Maccabees; Josephus
88-76 BCE	Alexander Jannaeus	Pharisees and their supporters	Civil war; about 800 opponents crucified, families killed before their eyes (Josephus); about 50,000 reported dead	Priestly legitimacy; Pharisaic interpretation of law	Josephus; figures debated
66-70 CE	Zealot, Sicarii, John of Gischala and Simon bar Giora factions	Moderate Jews, the high priest Ananus, rival factions, civilians of Jerusalem	Factions fight inside besieged Jerusalem; thousands of Jews killed; grain stores burned	Resistance vs. accommodation; purity and leadership	Josephus; Talmudic tradition blames the factions for the fall
9th-11th c.	Rabbanite leaders (e.g. Saadia Gaon) and Karaite leaders (mutual)	Rival camp	Mutual bans, excommunications, polemics	Authority of the Oral Torah	Documented; mostly non-lethal

A. Jews Against Jews

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1232-1233	Rabbis opposed to Maimonides	Maimonides's works and his defenders	Ban on his philosophical works; dispute reaches Christian authorities; Dominicans burn Jewish books in France (sequence and Jewish role debated)	Rationalism vs. literalism	Documented in part
1656	Amsterdam Jewish community leaders	Baruch Spinoza	Placed under the harshest herem (excommunication)	Denial of revelation and divine authorship of the Torah	Documented
1666	Rabbinic authorities	Followers of the false messiah Shabbetai Zevi	Bans and persecution	Messianic claims	Documented
1757	Frankists, with Bishop Dembowski	Talmudic (rabbinic) Jews	Frankists denounce the Talmud; Talmuds burned at Kamianets-Podilskyi	Talmudic authority	Documented
1772-1800s	Mitnagdim (Vilna rabbis)	Hasidim	Bans (herem), burning of Hasidic books, denunciation of leaders to the Russian state	Mysticism and the authority of the rebbe	Documented
1995	Yigal Amir, a religious Jewish extremist	Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin	Assassination	Halakhic arguments that territorial concession justified killing	Documented

B. Christians Against Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
325-380s	Rival imperial and church factions (Nicene and Arian, both sides)	Deposed and exiled bishops (e.g. Athanasius, exiled five times); rival partisans	Exile, deposition, riots and killings in Alexandria and Constantinople	Whether the Son is of one substance with the Father	Documented
311-411	Roman imperial authorities and Catholic church; Circumcellion militants on the Donatist side	Donatists; Catholic clergy attacked by Circumcellions	Imperial suppression; Circumcellion violence; Augustine defends state coercion ("compel them to come in")	Validity of sacraments by lapsed clergy	Documented
449-451	Supporters of Dioscorus at the "Robber Council" of Ephesus	Bishop Flavian of Constantinople	Flavian dies after being beaten; Chalcedon splits the church	Two natures or one in Christ	Documented
500s-640s	Byzantine state and Chalcedonian church (Justinian; Cyrus of Alexandria)	Copts and Syrian Miaphysites	Persecution, exile, forced conformity	Chalcedon	Documented
726-843	Iconoclast emperors and officials (Leo III, Constantine V)	Iconodule monks (e.g. Stephen the Younger, killed by a mob in 765)	Monks blinded, mutilated, killed	Whether images are idolatry	Documented
1054	Papal legates and Patriarch Cerularius (mutual)	None directly; unity of the church	Mutual excommunication; Great Schism	Papal primacy; the filioque	Documented
c. 1100	Emperor Alexios I Komnenos	Basil, Bogomil leader	Burned in the Hippodrome	Dualist heresy	Documented

B. Christians Against Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1204	Latin crusaders of the Fourth Crusade	Orthodox Christians of Constantinople	City sacked; churches desecrated	Crusader and dynastic politics; sack condemned by Innocent III	Documented
1209-1244	Catholic crusaders; later the Inquisition	Cathars and Occitans (including many Catholics at Béziers)	Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229), including Béziers; subsequent persecution at Montségur (1244), about 200 burned	Dualist theology	Tens of thousands killed
1233-1234	Crusading forces	Stedinger (Frisian peasants)	Declared heretics for withholding tithes; thousands killed	Church authority and tithes	Documented
1401-1520s	English church and crown	Lollards	De heretico comburendo (1401); burnings	Authority of scripture; transubstantiation	Documented
1415-1434	Council of Constance and Catholic crusaders (Hussites also fought back and killed)	Jan Hus and the Hussites	Hus burned at Constance (1415); five crusades against the Hussites	Communion in both kinds; church reform	Documented; tens of thousands killed
1487, 1655	Savoyard and papal forces	Waldensians	Crusade (1487); Piedmont Easter massacre (1655)	Heresy	Documented
1524-1525	Princes' armies (Luther urged them to strike)	Peasant rebels	German Peasants' War	Social reform justified by scripture	About 100,000 killed

B. Christians Against Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1527-1536	Catholic and Protestant authorities (Zurich; besiegers of Münster)	Anabaptists (Felix Manz drowned, 1527; Münster leaders tortured and executed, 1536)	Executions and siege	Adult baptism	Documented
1553	Calvin's Geneva	Michael Servetus	Burned	Rejection of the Trinity	Documented
1555-1558	Mary I's government	About 280 Protestants	Burned	Heresy	Documented
1559-1680s	English crown	Catholic priests and laypeople	Executions under penal statutes	Treason and heresy	Documented; hundreds executed
1562-1598	French Catholic crowds, nobles and crown (Huguenots also committed violence)	Huguenots	Wars of Religion; St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572)	Reformation doctrine	Estimates about 5,000 to 30,000 in the massacre; millions affected overall
1568-1648	Spanish crown (Council of Troubles)	Dutch Protestants and rebels	Eighty Years' War; about 1,000 executed by the Council of Troubles	Reformation doctrine, with politics	Documented
1618-1648	Catholic and Protestant armies on all sides (Imperial forces sacked Magdeburg 1631)	Civilians of Central Europe; people of Magdeburg	Thirty Years' War; about 20,000 killed at Magdeburg	Confessional conflict	An estimated 4-8 million dead
1642-1651	Royalist, Parliamentary, Puritan and Catholic forces	Civilians and opposing religious partisans	English Civil Wars; Irish Confederate Wars	Church government and doctrine	Roughly 200,000 dead in England; far more across Britain and Ireland

B. Christians Against Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1685	Louis XIV	Huguenots	Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; dragonnades; Protestant worship banned	Heresy	About 200,000 Huguenots fled
1650s-1700s	Russian Orthodox state and church	Old Believers	Persecution after the Nikonian reforms; mass self-immolations	Liturgical reform	Thousands dead
1695-1829	English Protestant state	Irish Catholics	Penal Laws strip land, education, rights	Catholicism	Documented
1969-1998	Protestant and Catholic paramilitaries, with the state	Civilians of both communities	The Troubles in Northern Ireland	Sectarian identity; national question	About 3,500 dead

C. Muslims Against Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
656	Mutineers from Egypt and Iraq	Caliph Uthman	Assassinated in Medina	Accusations of corruption and nepotism	Documented in tradition
656	Ali's army and the forces of Aisha, Talha and Zubayr (mutual)	Each other	Battle of the Camel	Legitimacy of Ali; vengeance for Uthman	About 10,000 reported
657	Armies of Ali and Mu'awiya (mutual)	Each other	Battle of Siffin	Caliphal authority	Tens of thousands reported

C. Muslims Against Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
661	A Kharijite (Ibn Muljam)	Caliph Ali	Assassinated	Kharijites declared both sides unbelievers (takfir)	Documented in tradition
680	Umayyad army	Husayn and his family	Killed at Karbala	Legitimate leadership of the community	Documented; foundational to the Sunni-Shia split
683-692	Umayyad forces	Residents of Medina; Ibn al-Zubayr and Mecca	Medina sacked at al-Harra; Mecca besieged, Kaaba damaged; Ibn al-Zubayr killed	Caliphal legitimacy	Documented
750	Abbasids	Umayyad princes	Revolution; massacre	Dynastic and Alid claims	Documented
833-851	Abbasid caliphs (al-Ma'mun and successors)	Traditionalist scholars, including Ahmad ibn Hanbal	The mihna, an inquisition over whether the Quran is created; Ibn Hanbal flogged	Nature of the Quran	Documented
922	Abbasid authorities	Al-Hallaj	Executed	Mystical claims	Documented
930	Qarmatians (Ismaili revolt)	Pilgrims and people of Mecca	Sack of Mecca; Black Stone carried away	Ismaili revolt	Reported 30,000 killed; figure debated
c. 1109	Almoravid authorities	Al-Ghazali's Ihya (books) and its readers	Burned in Córdoba	Mysticism vs. jurisprudence	Documented
1090s	Seljuks and Nizari Ismailis (mutual)	Each other's leaders and civilians	Assassinations and massacres on both sides	Ismaili doctrine	Documented

C. Muslims Against Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1147	Almohads	Almoravids; people of Marrakesh	City taken and its people massacred	Almohads called Almoravids anthropomorphists	Documented
1171	Saladin	Fatimid dynasty; Ismailis	Fatimid caliphate abolished; Ismailis suppressed	Sunni restoration	Documented
1501-1510	Safavids	Sunnis of Tabriz and Iran	Forced conversion to Shi'ism; Sunni clerics killed	Imposition of Twelver Shi'ism	Documented
1514	Ottomans under Selim I	Shia and Qizilbash in Anatolia	Massacres; battle of Chaldiran	Heresy of the Qizilbash	Tens of thousands reported
1514-1639	Ottomans and Safavids (mutual)	Populations of Iraq and the Caucasus	A century of wars over Iraq and the Caucasus	Sunni-Shia rivalry, with territory	Documented
1802	Wahhabi-Saudi forces	Shia of Karbala	Karbala sacked; Husayn's shrine looted	Shia veneration of tombs as polytheism	About 2,000-5,000 killed
1806, 1925	Wahhabi-Saudi forces	Muslims who venerate tombs (Shia and many Sunnis)	Graves of early Muslims at Jannat al-Baqi in Medina demolished	Veneration of tombs	Documented
1974-onward (undated)	Pakistani state and mobs	Ahmadis	Declared non-Muslim; criminalized (1984); attacks, including Lahore (2010)	Finality of the Prophet	Hundreds killed; Lahore 2010 about 86
1980-1988	Iran and Iraq (mutual)	Soldiers and civilians on both sides	War with strong sectarian rhetoric	Territorial and political rivalry, with religious and sectarian rhetoric	About 500,000-1,000,000 dead
1980s-2000s	Sunni militant groups in Pakistan	Pakistani Shia	Sectarian killings, bombings	Takfir of Shia	Thousands killed

C. Muslims Against Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Religious / political dispute	Evidence / toll
1998	Taliban	Shia Hazaras of Mazar-i-Sharif	Massacre	Takfir of Shia	About 2,000 or more killed
2003-2008	Sunni and Shia militias in Iraq (both)	Civilians of the opposing sect	Samarra shrine bombing (2006) and the sectarian war that followed	Sectarian identity	Tens of thousands killed
2011-onward (undated)	Syrian state, rebel groups, ISIS and others	Civilians, especially along sectarian lines	Civil war with major sectarian dimensions	Sectarian identity	Large war-related toll; dated source and civilian/combatant definitions required
2014	ISIS	Shia cadets at Camp Speicher	Massacre	Takfir of Shia	About 1,700 reported
2015-onward (undated)	Saudi-led coalition and Houthis (Zaydi Shia) (both)	Yemeni civilians	War in Yemen, with famine	Sectarian rivalry, with politics	Large direct and indirect war-related toll; UNDP estimates include hunger, disease and loss of services
2017	ISIS Sinai	Sufi worshippers at the Rawda mosque	Attack	Takfir of Sufis	311 killed
2025	Armed groups in coastal Syria	Alawite civilians	Massacres	Sectarian	Over 1,000 reported in the original compilation; source and reporting date not supplied

Table 3: Wars and Atrocities Between the Three Abrahamic Religions

Scope: conflict across Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities. Religious identity alone does not establish religious authorization. Some events overlap broader entries elsewhere. Modern Israeli-Palestinian entries also concern national and territorial conflict.

A. Jews and Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
c. 34-36 CE	Jewish authorities and a crowd	Stephen (an early Jewish Christian)	Stoned to death (Acts 7)	Blasphemy	Textual
c. 44 CE	Herod Agrippa I	James, son of Zebedee (Christian)	Executed (Acts 12)	Religious and political	Textual
c. 62 CE	High priest Ananus and the Sanhedrin	James, brother of Jesus (Christian)	Stoned	Violation of the law	Josephus
c. 132-135	Bar Kokhba's movement (Jewish)	Jewish Christians	Persecuted for refusing to join the revolt (reported by Justin Martyr)	Messianic claim	Christian source; disputed
306-329	Church councils and Constantine (Christian)	Jews	Elvira bars intermarriage; laws forbid Jewish proselytizing and bar Jews from Jerusalem	"Perfidious" Jews	Documented
388	Christian crowd led by a bishop	Jews of Callinicum	Synagogue burned; Ambrose opposes compensating the Jews	Anti-Jewish zeal	Documented
414-415	Cyril of Alexandria and crowds	Jews of Alexandria	Expulsion, according to Socrates Scholasticus	Anti-Jewish hostility	Documented; scale debated
418	Bishop Severus and followers	Jews of Minorca	Synagogue burned; about 540 Jews converted under pressure	Conversion	Letter of Severus
519, 535-553	Ravenna mobs; Emperor Justinian	Jews	Synagogues burned; laws restricting worship and testimony	Heresy and perfidy	Documented

A. Jews and Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
614	Jewish forces allied with Persia	Christians of Jerusalem	Massacre reported at the Persian conquest	Religious and political	Christian sources report tens of thousands; debated
612-633	Visigothic kings; Fourth Council of Toledo	Jews of Spain	Forced baptism; converts forbidden to relapse; children taken	Religious unity	Documented
1215	Fourth Lateran Council	Jews	Distinctive dress and badge required; restrictions on office and trade	Church law	Documented
1240-1242	French crown and Church	Talmud and Jewish scholars	Disputation of Paris; about 10,000 volumes burned in 1242	Talmud charged with blasphemy	Documented
1251, 1320	Pastoureaux movements	Jews of France and Aragon	Mobs attack and kill Jews	Crusading zeal	Thousands reported
1298	Rintfleisch bands	Jews of Franconia and Bavaria	Over 100 communities destroyed	Host-desecration libel	Thousands reported
1336-1338	Armleder bands	Jews of Alsace, Swabia, Franconia	About 110 communities attacked	Libel and zeal	Documented
1391	Mobs in Seville and across Castile and Aragon	Jews	Massacres; tens of thousands forced to convert	Preaching of Ferrand Martínez	Thousands killed
1475	Trent authorities	Jews of Trent	About 15 executed after a blood-libel accusation	Ritual-murder libel	Documented
1497, 1506	Portuguese crown; Lisbon mob	Jews, New Christians	Forced baptism (1497); Lisbon massacre of 2,000-4,000 New Christians (1506)	Religious unity; suspicion of secret Judaism	Documented

A. Jews and Christians

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1516-1555	Venice; Pope Paul IV (Cum nimis absurdum, 1555)	Jews	Ghettos established; enclosure, badges, trade bans	Church law	Documented
1648-1657	Cossack and peasant forces	Jews of Ukraine	Massacres in the Khmelnytsky uprising	Orthodox against Catholic Poles and Jews	Estimates range from 20,000 to over 100,000
1858	Papal authorities	Edgardo Mortara, a six-year-old Jewish boy, and his family	Child taken from his family after a secret baptism	Canon law on baptized children	Documented
1930s-1945	Nazi regime and collaborators, many from Christian states	European Jews	Holocaust, about 6 million killed. The Nazi regime was not itself Christian, but it built on centuries of Christian antisemitic doctrine and law	Racial ideology, with a Christian antisemitic background	Documented

B. Christians and Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
717-718	Umayyad armies (Muslim)	Byzantine Constantinople (Christian)	Siege, repelled	Jihad	Documented
1098	First Crusaders (Christian)	Muslims of Ma'arra	Massacre; accounts report crusader cannibalism	Crusade	Documented; toll debated
1187	Saladin (Muslim)	Captured Templars and Hospitallers	Prisoners executed after Hattin	Holy war	Documented

B. Christians and Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1191	Richard I (Christian)	About 2,700 Muslim prisoners	Executed at Acre	Crusade	Documented
1212-1248	Castile, Aragon, Portugal (Christian)	Muslims of Andalusia	Las Navas de Tolosa; conquest of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248); mosques converted, populations expelled or subjected	Reconquista as crusade	Documented
1291	Mamluks (Muslim)	Christians of Acre	Fall of the city; defenders killed, inhabitants enslaved	Jihad	Documented
1300	Charles II of Anjou (Christian)	Muslims of Lucera	Colony destroyed; inhabitants sold into slavery	Religious unity	Documented
1396	Bayezid I (Muslim)	Crusader prisoners	Executed after Nicopolis	Holy war	Thousands reported
1492	Castile and Aragon (Christian)	Muslims of Granada	Fall of the last Muslim kingdom	Reconquista	Documented
1530s-1780s	Barbary corsairs (Muslim)	European and American Christians	Raids and enslavement; about 1 million captives estimated	Holy war and plunder	Documented; figure debated
1627	Barbary corsairs (Muslim)	Icelanders	About 400 abducted	Raiding	Documented
1821	Greek insurgents (Christian)	Muslims and Jews of Tripolitsa	Massacre	Religious and national	Thousands reported
1822	Ottoman forces (Muslim)	Greeks of Chios	Massacre and enslavement	Reprisal	About 20,000 killed and 50,000 enslaved, reported
1876	Ottoman irregulars (Muslim)	Bulgarian Christians at Batak	Massacre	Reprisal	About 5,000 reported

B. Christians and Muslims

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1877-1878	Russian forces and Balkan irregulars (Christian)	Muslims of Bulgaria and the Caucasus	Killings and expulsions	War and religious identity	Hundreds of thousands displaced
1975-1990	Christian and Muslim militias (both)	Civilians of Lebanon	Civil war	Sectarian identity	About 120,000 dead
1982	Christian Phalangist militia, with Israeli forces controlling the area	Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila	Massacre	Revenge and sectarian war	About 800-3,500 reported
1983-2005	Government of Sudan (Muslim-led)	South Sudanese Christians and animists	Civil war; Islamization campaign	Jihad rhetoric	About 2 million dead
1992-1995	Bosnian Serb forces (Orthodox Christian)	Bosnian Muslims	Siege of Sarajevo; Srebrenica massacre (1995)	Ethnic and religious nationalism	About 8,000 killed at Srebrenica; about 100,000 dead in the war
2013-2014	Séléka (largely Muslim) and anti-balaka (largely Christian) militias	Civilians of the other community in the Central African Republic	Sectarian massacres and expulsions	Sectarian identity	Thousands killed
2015	Al-Shabaab (Muslim)	Christian students at Garissa	Massacre after religious screening	Jihad	148 killed
2017	ISIS (Muslim)	Coptic Christians	Palm Sunday bombings in Tanta and Alexandria	Jihad	45 killed
2019	Islamist bombers (Muslim)	Christians and tourists in Sri Lanka	Easter bombings	Jihad	About 269 killed

C. Muslims and Jews

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
628	Muslim forces	Jews of Khaybar	Fighters killed, remaining residents made tenants; later expelled under Caliph Umar	Treachery	Early sources, written later
1465	Mobs and rebels in Fez	Jews of Fez	Massacre	Religious grievance	Documented
1679-1680	Zaydi Imam of Yemen	Jews of Yemen	Exiled to Mawza, many dying	Religious law	Documented
1805, 1815	Mobs in Algiers	Jews	Pogroms	Communal hatred	Documented
1839	Authorities and crowds in Mashhad	Jews of Mashhad	Killings and forced conversion	Religious pressure	Documented; about 30-35 killed
1929	Arab mobs	Jews of Hebron, Safed, Jerusalem	Massacres	Dispute over Temple Mount and the Western Wall	67 killed at Hebron; 133 Jews killed overall
1941	Mobs and soldiers in Baghdad	Jews of Baghdad	Farhud	Pro-Nazi nationalism and religious hatred	About 180 officially, up to 600 by other estimates
1945	Mobs in Tripoli	Jews of Tripoli	Pogrom	Communal	About 140 killed
1948	Arab forces	Jewish convoy and settlement	Hadassah convoy (78 killed); Kfar Etzion (about 127 killed)	War over Palestine	Documented
1948	Irgun and Lehi; Israeli forces (Jewish)	Palestinians (mostly Muslim)	Deir Yassin (about 100-120 villagers killed); expulsion from Lydda and elsewhere; about 700,000 displaced	War over Palestine	Documented; details debated

C. Muslims and Jews

Date	Perpetrator(s)	Victim(s)	Event	Claimed authority / motive	Evidence / toll
1948-1970s	Arab governments and mobs	Jews of Arab lands	About 850,000 expelled or forced to leave	Reprisal; nationalism	Aggregate and causes of departure require country-specific sources; not independently verified in this review
1994	Baruch Goldstein (Jewish extremist)	Muslim worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque, Hebron	Shooting	Religious-nationalist extremism	29 killed
2000-2005	Palestinian militants and Israeli forces (both)	Civilians on both sides	Second Intifada	National and religious claims	Original totals include civilians and combatants; source, cutoff date and breakdown required
2012, 2015	Jihadist gunmen	Jews in Toulouse and Paris	Attacks on a Jewish school and a kosher supermarket	Jihadist ideology	4 killed in each
2023	Hamas and allied groups	Israelis and foreign nationals	October 7 attack; about 1,200 killed, about 250 taken hostage	Jihadist and national ideology	Documented
2023-onward (undated)	Israeli forces	Palestinians in Gaza, including civilians	War and bombardment; large civilian toll	Security, with religious-nationalist claims	No verified current total supplied. Cite a dated report; distinguish total reported deaths from civilian deaths.

Notes to the corrected tables

These sources support the corrections identified in the workbook. They are not a complete bibliography for all 210 entries. Other historical claims and casualty estimates still require individual citations.

1. Chronology of Amaziah: Edwin R. Thiele, chronology discussion, Journal of Biblical Literature (1974), [Read source](#)
2. City of Fritzlar, historical chronology: Geismar oak, 723/724, [Read source](#)
3. Socrates Scholasticus, Church History VII.15: political jealousy and the Cyril-Orestes conflict, [Read source](#)
4. Innocent III, reprimand of papal legate, translated in Fordham Medieval Sourcebook. Condemnation of the sack, followed by acceptance of the new order: [Read source](#)
5. Pietro U. Dini, Foundations of Old Prussian, publisher description: spoken into the 17th century, [Read source](#)
6. 2 Kings 15:16-18 reports the atrocity but gives no divine command for it: [Read source](#)
7. Innocent III, reprimand of papal legate: [Read source](#) Overlaps Table 1 row 38.
8. Burning of the Talmud, Encyclopaedia Judaica account reproduced by Jewish Virtual Library: Kamenets-Podolski, fall 1757, [Read source](#)
9. State Archives of North Rhine-Westphalia: execution on 22 January 1536, [Read source](#)
10. Date range corrected to include the already-listed 1244 event. Peter Vronsky, identities of Cathars executed at Montségur, [Read source](#) Overlaps Table 1 row 39.
11. UNDP, Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen, model-based estimates include direct and indirect mortality: [Read source](#) Not a current battlefield-death count.
12. An Expulsion of Jews in the Yemen (1679-1680), scholarly study: [Read source](#)